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BEING IN WRONG PLACE AT RIGHT TIME EARNS V CORPS LIEUTENANT A SILVER STAR

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WIESBADEN, Germany — Like many Soldiers honored as heroes, 1st Lt.

Christopher Dean of V Corps' 1st Armored Division says he was just doing his job the day he earned a Silver Star for leading the rescue of a patrol ambushed in Baghdad.

"People don't say, 'I'm going to try to win a Silver Star today.' We go out and we're put in an extraordinary position, and the right people recognize what we are doing," said Dean. "I wouldn't say I was in the right place at the right time, but I guess I was fortunate to be in the wrong place at the right time."



SPC KRISTOPHER JOSEPH
1st Lt. Christopher Dean of V Corps' Company C, 2nd Battalion 37th Armor speaks with a reporter during the division's welcome home festivities. Dean was awarded the Silver Star during the event, for leading the rescue of 19 Soldiers from an ambush in Baghdad's Sadr City in April.

Dean, a platoon leader in the division's Company C, 2nd Battalion 37th Armor, based in Friedberg, Germany, was helping to hand authority for the division mission over to the incoming 1st Cavalry Division at that "right time" -- April 4. More importantly, the lieutenant's assignment that day was to serve as Quick Reaction Force tank platoon leader, with oversight for the "wrong place" -- Sadr City, arguably the most violent section of Baghdad.

Sure enough, Dean's tour of duty that day was interrupted by a request to come to the radio at the QRF site. Soldiers' voices shouted from its speaker: "We've got contact! We've got contact!"

A patrol from 1st Cavalry was being ambushed in the city.

Dean rolled out immediately with four tanks under his charge. Traveling at top speed, they headed to the grid coordinates given by the besieged patrol. As soon as they arrived, the QRF was hit by a barrage of gunfire.

"We had rounds coming in from everywhere, said Dean. "It sounded like Rice Krispies popping." One of his Soldiers was killed.

Unable to locate the ambushed patrol, Dean says, he pulled his tanks back to regroup, meeting up with three more tanks led by his company commander, Capt. John C. Moore. Dean briefed Moore on the situation and was ordered to lead a seven-tank attack back into the engagement area to find the ambushed patrol.

"At this point I had a brief moment when I thought, 'Oh my God, do I really have to go back in there?' said the lieutenant. "Then I realized that American lives are depending on us and if we (aren't going) to get them, who is?"

On the way back to the ambush site, the seven tanks took another heavy dose of enemy fire. Dean said his tank's .50 caliber machine gun was taken out, leaving him atop the vehicle with only his M4 rifle. He was hit by shrapnel from a rocket-propelled grenade blast.

Reaching the ambushed patrol, Moore and his tanks provided security while the QRF dismounted to help get the patrol out. Under heavy enemy fire they pulled out the dead and wounded and put them inside the tanks, then used one of Dean's tanks to push two damaged vehicles out of the area.

"We took the worst of what they (enemy) had to offer that day," said Dean. "I really didn't have time to be scared, with all of the contact we were getting."

In all, the entire attack and rescue spanned four hours and seven kilometers, said Dean. His team had rescued 19 Soldiers from the ambush.

In a huge ceremony October 7, 1st Armored Division welcomed its "Iron Soldiers" home from their 15 months in Iraq, and Dean stood before thousands of his fellow troops as a Silver Star was pinned to his uniform, to wear along with the Purple Heart he had been presented earlier for the wounds he received during the rescue.

Downplaying the heroism of the mission, Dean said the rescue was a novel effort because it was "armor pure." Using tanks alone without the support of infantry troops is not typical by doctrine, he explained.

"I think history will show that this was a ground-breaking event because it was a 'tank-only' mission," Dean said. "Here we used the maneuver fire-powered shock effect with the tanks that led to the successful rescue of those Soldiers."

Heroic or not, Dean claims he would do it all over again.

"This might be cliché," he said, "but there is no greater honor in the world than leading Soldiers in combat, and for me to have that privilege is something I couldn't be more thankful for."

